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INFORMATION INTEGRATION OF THE EUROPEAN SPACE IN THE CONDITIONS OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The article discusses the specifics of the European Union information space functioning as a factor in the integration processes. Current trends in the formation and development of communication infrastructure in the conditions of social and economic spaces digital transformation are analyzed. The article reveals the importance of Internet resources and social media in the field of the digital economy, which form a new social sphere as a resource for opposing disintegration and nationalist tendencies.

ИНФОРМАЦИОННАЯ ИНТЕГРАЦИЯ ЕВРОПЕЙСКОГО ПРОСТРАНСТВА В УСЛОВИЯХ ЦИФРОВОЙ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИИ

В статье рассматривается специфика функционирования информационного пространства Европейского союза как фактора активизации интеграционных процессов. Анализируются актуальные тенденции формирования и развития коммуникационной инфраструктуры в условиях цифровой трансформации социального и экономического пространства. Выявляется значение в поле цифровой экономики интернет-ресурсов и социальных медиа, которые образуют новую общественную сферу — ресурс противостояния дезинтеграционным и националистическим настроениям.

European integration, perhaps for the first time in the history of widescale integration projects, has shown that the economic and political interaction of states, even those that are in close partnership, needs information support. For European citizens, the media structures are the main sources of information on integration topics, resources for shaping a common agenda, and sources for affirming European identity. Communication cooperation, along with political, economic and public law, became the basis for integration, complicated by the objective problems of information systems' growth: alienation of citizens from politics and European institutions, aggravation of national contradictions in the purposeful formation of European unity (European identity), the need to update legislation in the information sphere.

The media in the United Europe faced the task of finding the optimal model of functioning in the information field, many times exceeding state borders and the sphere of national media influence. Common European media using English as *lingua franca* have been identified as the basis for the European identity formation [1,

p. 350]. In the EU the relationship between the political and information sphere acquired not a declarative and theoretical nature, but real content and expression (and in this case Brexit is not the only example). It was in the EU that a new type of interstate media was created and evolved from the point of view of structural-functional and creative — *Euronews*. This European media offered a broadcast in several languages, adapted to national audience segments, but forming a single agenda for political integration. In the EU, the program to create a digital single market has been developed taking into account the necessary participation of the media in economic processes. Disintegration trends of the last years of the European Union evolution, make us think about the question of whether information integration is a condition for the interstate unions' stability. In the end, the presence of a single information space significantly expands the resources of network communication and, therefore, increases the destructive potential of disintegration trends. In other words, media communication in the European Union acts in parallel as a factor of integration and as a factor of disintegration, which is a relatively new phenomenon in the global information space.

Speaking of European integration, it is necessary to note an important feature of the EU information space evolution. The creation of a united Europe's unified media in terms of chronological falls at the stage of final registration of the EU (transformation of the European Economic Union into the European Union) — the 1990s. This means that communicative integration, which inevitably developed in one form or another with the deepening of economic interaction, moved along the path of natural evolution, leading to the coordination of national media activities and without directly affecting the sphere of interstate / supranational media cooperation: “The European Commission has long managed to rule European integration in silence. As a result, the public, media and politicians have lost interest in reading, writing or talking about EU affairs, and a “non-communication” circle has emerged about the EU” (our translation. — *S. V.*) [2, p. 187]. To a certain extent, it can be argued that the creation of interstate media in the EU was belated; it did not surpass the awareness of the need to form a European identity. At present, the further evolution of the single information space of the EU should be considered as one of the factors of deepening integration processes, an integral part and an element of policy that promotes harmonious and balanced economic development.

European media policies developed without a sustainable coordination center and growing global competition in the field of mass media. Since the EU was an exclusively Western project, the media was regulated at the national level, while preserving the specific features of pluralistic, democratic and liberal models [3]. The liberalization and homogenization of the media and communications market has allowed European players to become global. The stable tradition of supporting public

service broadcasters has moved from the national to the international level, having received an additional mechanism of support from the EU institutions. Therefore, on the one hand, the task was to maintain and develop the communication infrastructure and conditions for the design of a single media market. On the other hand, there was a need to develop new media, understanding the prospects for the creation of a digital single market.

We draw attention to the fact that the EU documents lack a single interpretation of the information policy; its functions, tasks, components, and implementation mechanisms are not unified. However, priorities are quite clearly defined, among which are: ensuring citizens' information rights and media pluralism, information support for integration processes, guarantees of free competition in the media market, coordination of EU legislation in the field of media activities, pairing national media spheres, promoting the creation of a single European media product and transnational media development [4].

The classification of the EU information policy principles is based on three factors: the sociopolitical values of United Europe (they are secured by European laws), the interests of the European Union (secured by European laws and directives), the national interests of EU countries (justified in national legislation). The EU's fundamental areas in the information sphere include the principle of free movement of television programs on the territory of the single market, the principle of media pluralism (media autonomy from the political and economic sphere, restriction of media concentration, media content pluralism), the principle of free competition in the information market, the principle of cultural exclusion (protection of the national media market from excessive foreign influence), the principle of the predominance of the European media product [5, p. 257–259]. The rights of national states in determining the policy in the mass information field are limited by the principles of subsidiarity, the organic interaction of European and national media policies, the preservation of cultural diversity [6].

The Lisbon Treaty of 2007 once again declared the freedom of action for the European media (Article II-71) and created the basis for the approval of opinions' pluralism in the media [7]. In the same year, the Strategy "Communicating Europe in Partnership" (2007) was adopted, which touched upon the problem of a very limited understanding of the EU essence, the tasks of the institutions of the Union and the principles of its policies (including the media policy) by the European citizens [8]. The authorities responsible for the communication in the EU development are the integration management bodies, the governments of the EU member states, and other interested organizations. The strategy "European communication in audiovisual media" (2008) was aimed at supporting the existing broadcast networks in the EU and

creating new ones [9]. Due to the fact that the creation of new broadcasting networks required considerable time and financial costs, the European Commission decided to focus on supporting existing broadcasters: providing them with information about the EU functioning, providing financial support, creating an audiovisual library.

The recognition of the importance of information interaction in the EU problem is evidenced by the communication reform initiated by the European Commission in the first decade of the 21st century, which “made the sphere of communication with society one of the strategic goals, recognizing it as a separate community policy” (our translation. — *S. V.*) [10, p. 22]. The task of transition to two-way communication arose on the agenda: from institution-oriented, prioritizing the work of EU institutions, to citizen-oriented, aimed at turning the media audience into active participants in the integration process. From this period, in fact, begins the countdown of the targeted information policy of the European Union, focused on the formation of a new European public sphere, increasing the information transparency of the EU, promoting the growth of civic activity and public support for the integration project.

Considerable attention has been paid in recent years to digital transformation: the European Union’s media space in the next decade will develop in line with the general trends identified by the Digital Single Market Strategy (2015), one of whose initiatives is to analyze the structure of the audiovisual media and adapt existing rules to new business models for content distribution [11]. A digital single market can lead to the creation of a new media communication environment in Europe, qualitatively improving the existing economic models of media activities, reducing the costs of information dissemination, deepening further media convergence, expanding the audience of both traditional and new media.

Social and new digital media with their focus on dialogue, audience coverage, organization of deliberative discussion form the most promising communication channel (traditional media primarily act as a news relay resource) [12]. After the adoption of the White Paper on the European Communication Policy (2006), the European Commission actively promotes the Internet resource *Europa.eu*, which provides general information on the functioning of the EU (legal, statistical, etc.), highlights recent events in the Union, and provides an audience connection with information resources of European institutions and agencies. In this case, *Europa.eu* does not contain structured and relevant data on the European media activities. According to 2014 data, 36.8 million users visited this multilingual resource, and 94 % of users were fully satisfied with the information provided [13]. The i2010 initiative (A European Information Society for growth and employment), addressing the problem of developing citizens’ information and communication skills, providing access to high-

speed Internet, helped to bridge the digital divide between EU states as a factor hindering integration [14].

Internet resources and social media in the new field of digital economy form a new public sphere to discuss European integration, with the ability to attract an audience that is many times larger than the audience of traditional national media. A new type of media is less dependent on profits, as users are both consumers and content creators. Moreover, in the EU, social media can overcome language barriers that lead to the European media landscape fragmentation. For example, Euronews's multilingual pages on Facebook are not only reflecting events in the European Union, but also participating in shaping the integration agenda, publishing news before they are on television: "If we publish a brochure about Europe, it's 99 % money thrown away; if we make a radio or television program, we get access to a limited audience, but if we use Facebook or organize social media chats, we easily reach over a million people" (our translation. — *S. V.*) [15, p. 278].

Let us assume that new economic and technological conditions will allow overcoming the relative fragmentation of the European media sphere (taking into account the existing differences in national media systems due to objective economic and sociocultural factors, some researchers even point to the absence of a single European information space as such).

In the conditions of digitalization of the EU information space, the evolution of various formats of interstate media structures, changes in the nature of mass media consumption, growth of disintegration attitudes in the European Union, the tendency to reduce the traditional print media influence is becoming more pronounced. The latter were localized within the national framework, fulfilling the task rather of diversifying the EU information space rather than its integration (despite the fact that the EU has 16 multilingual daily and weekly online magazines and newspapers). Traditional media are not capable of reflecting the whole diversity of opinions and assessments regarding European integration, as well as creating platforms for discussions on issues of interstate importance that shape public opinion [15, p. 276].

The most important task of the United Europe's media is overcoming the Brexit consequences, among which is the growth of disintegration and nationalist attitudes among EU citizens, indicating the dominance of national identity over European [16]. The Euronews channel in Brexit took the position of "counterweight" to "lack of a comprehensive European perspective" sentiment. Brexit showed that in crisis, there was an urgent need for responsible and objective pan-European media that could fill gaps in national and local media focused on local issues: "What is really not enough now — and this gap will become even more obvious in the coming years — is plat-

form for dialogue between the EU and the UK, which would allow them to introduce their relations in a new direction” (our translation. — *S. V.*) [17].

Experts draw attention to a (somewhat paradoxical) pattern: the dominance of English in the global media leads to the fact that the media located in the United Kingdom, many of which adhere to “Euro-skepticism”, acquire a disproportionate influence on reporting to the world community of events in Europe [18]. For example, American and Asian media receive news from London resources: “It is the failure of continental news organizations that the narrative of the EU and of the Euro itself around the world is being created, shaped and continued by media organizations outside the Eurozone — and soon, as it turns out, outside the EU” [17]. And the question is not even that British journalists (for example, on BBC) preach “Euro-skepticism”, but that they are now “not in Europe”. Experts draw attention to the fact that the forces supporting the European integration do not fully use media resources to demonstrate the benefits of integration to citizens, and not only economic [19]: “<...> since most broadcast reporting is dominated by the main two parties — and Euro-skeptic Tories have been more vocal than Europhile Labour MPs — audiences have been more exposed to arguments against the EU than those in favour” [20]. According to the leaders of Euronews, “People are disappointed with the European Union because they probably perceive it just as a bureaucratic structure that has no real meaning for them” [21, p. 59]. However, some British publishers still support a pro-European position: for example, the Financial Times positions itself as a European news organization (“a British brand with an English eyeglass going over the world of news” [17]).

Consequently, the problem in the European system of mass information, which has led to the realization of the need to create common mass media for the integration association, remains not fully resolved. Europe again faces issues of information sovereignty, communication unity and alignment of internal interests in the media sphere with European needs. Despite the introduction of a new global media format, the EU media has yet to develop a functioning model that will overcome the contradictions between the concepts of “European identity” and “cultural diversity”.

The whole period of the European integration has shown: the single information space of a subnational association is not able to absorb national information spaces, making them structural elements of the global media system. It is possible to eliminate this pattern only by administrative methods, which would mean violation of the criteria for media independence and freedom of information. It is for this reason that Euronews was the first among world media who turned to the “glocal” media format, while affirming its information domination in the world market [22] (CNN could not offer such a format, as it did not initially encounter the need to coordinate

and harmonize diverse national media systems). Thus, the European media system development reflects the history of the European unity formation and approval.

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